

Destroying Non-Archival Records: Methods for Destroying Paper Records

Purpose: Provide further guidance to state and local government agencies (in addition to [chapter 434-640 WAC](#)) on methods for destroying non-archival paper records which have met their minimum retention period.

When destroying paper records, there are two key considerations:

1. Does the destruction render the records unreadable?
2. Is the destruction method appropriate for the sensitivity/confidentiality level of the records?

One size does not always fit all, so when choosing the most suitable method of destroying paper records, their sensitivity/confidentiality level(s) must be considered.

Records that are exempt from public disclosure and/or otherwise considered confidential must remain secure during the destruction process and must be reduced to an illegible condition in accordance with [WAC 434-640-020](#).

[WAC 434-640-030](#) outlines the following conditions when destroying records by recycling:

- 1) Prompt destruction of the records is ensured;
- 2) The recycling agent/entity has any required licenses and is insured or bonded;
- 3) The records are not unattended and unprotected as they await destruction; and,
- 4) The agency has a contract or written agreement in effect with the recycling entity which includes the above conditions.

Common methods of destroying paper records:

Straight-cut Shredding – Simple cutting of paper into thin vertical strips. This is appropriate for most non-confidential records. However, it is easier to reassemble and/or still read portions of the original record than cross-cut shredding.

Cross-cut Shredding – Paper is cut into small confetti-sized pieces. Washington State Archives recommends this form of shredding for sensitive/confidential paper records.

Recycling/Pulping – Paper is mixed with water and chemicals to break it down into a mixture of strands of cellulose called pulp which can then be recycled into other paper products.

Shredding and Pulping – A combination of shredding the records first and then pulping is a more certain method of destroying paper records. Records destroyed on behalf of state agencies by the State Records Center Warehouse are destroyed using this method.

Additional information is available on our Destruction of Public Records webpage at:

<http://www.sos.wa.gov/archives/RecordsManagement/Destruction-of-Public-Records.aspx>

**Additional advice regarding the management of public records is available from
Washington State Archives:**

**www.sos.wa.gov/archives
recordsmanagement@sos.wa.gov**